

RIGHT MUST AND WILL SUCCEED
Excerpts from the letters of
Sergeant Edmund Burke Wylie,
Company K, 31st Iowa Infantry Regiment
by Dieter C. Ullrich

With the defeat of General Robert E. Lee's army at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania and the capitulation of Confederate forces at Vicksburg, Mississippi in the summer of 1863, the tide of the Civil War shifted favorably to the side of the Union. As summer turned to fall, armies of blue and grey converged upon the hills and mountains of southeastern Tennessee and northwestern Georgia. What followed was a long and bloody campaign that covered several months and eventually ended the South's struggle for independence.

Sergeant Burke Wylie of the 31st Iowa Infantry Regiment was an eyewitness to the events and series of historic battles that occurred between Chattanooga, Tennessee and Atlanta, Georgia. His vivid descriptions of the ferocity of combat, the geographic features of battlefields and the local inhabitants he encountered are well depicted in his correspondence. Sergeant Wylie's letters begin in December 1863 near Chattanooga and conclude in September 1864 outside of Atlanta. The first letter was written to his father on December 2, from the "Vicinity of Chattanooga", explaining the recent battle at the heights before the city and the toll it took upon the men in his regiment.

Dear Father,

The mail will go out in a few minutes and I will only write to you a few lines at present to inform you of my welfare, as you will no doubt be anxious to hear from me now, since there has been a great battle fought here.

I rec'd two letters from you since I have had time to answer them as we have been marching nearly all the time

since the reception of them. So I hope you will not think that I did not want to write. Very different from that, I think it quite a favour to receive a letter from you, Father. I still enjoy good health, for which I try to feel thankful. I was really glad to learn you still enjoy your usual health.

More than likely you know as well as much and probably more than I do about the battle here. So I will not endeavor to write much about it, only to tell you what part the 1st Division Army Corps. (Well you will understand that I was not in the fight in person, as I have before stated I am on detached service) But the 31st Iowa took a very active part. The first division was one that made the charge on Lookout Mountain and captured quite a number of prisoners, arms and artillery. My regiment lost four killed (one of Co. K) and several wounded. The Reg't fought for six hours without being relieved. Most of the men shot away over 100 rounds. After Lookout was taken the Division took part in the fight at Missionary Ridge and at or near Ring Gold station. In the several fights the Regiment lost in killed and wounded twenty men. As usual, the Regiment was very lucky – it was in the thickest of the fight and lost but few men. The 9th Iowa did not lose many. Sam Scott* got back just in time to get into the fight and came out all right. George Strain** got back to the Regiment in time to get into the fight, and also came through alright. Last night the division returned from the battlefield and is now camped for a day or two near Chattanooga. We expect to move back 28 miles to Bridgeport on the railroad. Until we camp someplace I will not get time to write to answer your letters. In the meantime, let this excuse me.

Your affectionate son, Burke

*Sergeant Samuel S. Scott, Company A of the 9th Iowa Infantry Regiment.

**Private George Strain, Company K of the 31st Iowa Infantry Regiment.

Edmund Burke Wylie was born in 1838, the son of David and Harriet Belle Wylie of South Strabane Township, Washington County, Pennsylvania. His youth was spent on the family farm with six brothers and sisters not far from the county seat of Washington, Pennsylvania. He attended local schools and from 1857 to 1858 studied at Washington College. Just prior to the Civil War, Burke (as he was known to his family) headed west and settled in the small village of Andrew in Jackson County, Iowa. The call for volunteers beckoned him and he enlisted in the Union Army on August 13, 1862. He was mustered into Company K of the 31st Iowa Infantry Regiment at Davenport on October 13, 1862.¹

After only a month of military drill, Burke and his regiment boarded transports at Davenport and traveled down the Mississippi to Helena, Arkansas where they arrived on November 20, 1862. By the middle of December, the 31st Iowa was attached to the Fifteenth Army Corps commanded by General William T. Sherman and ordered to the mouth of the Yazoo River on December 22. Burke's first taste of battle occurred five days later as Sherman's troops attempted to approach Vicksburg, Mississippi from the northeast. The 31st exchanged shots with the rebel defenses at Snyder's Mill but withdrew two days later after a failed frontal assault at Chickasaw Bayou.

On the second day of the New Year, Burke found himself on a transport bound for the Arkansas River. His regiment disembarked near Arkansas Post, Arkansas on the January 9, and on the following evening marched through lowland swamps to attack the enemy at Fort Hindman on the morning of January 11. The outnumbered Confederates surrendered that afternoon after a severe shelling from Union artillery and ironclad gunboats. Following the capture of Fort Hindman, the 31st encamped for the winter at Young's Point, Louisiana.²

Burke's regiment remained in camp until April 27, when it crossed the Mississippi to Milliken's Bend to join General

Ulysses S. Grant's march to Jackson, Mississippi. On May 12, Burke came under fire at Raymond, Mississippi and two days later took part in the capture of Jackson. Grant's troops, including the 31st Iowa, marched west toward Vicksburg and reached the city's fortifications on May 18. Grant forced an assault upon the defenses on May 19 and May 22, but both attempts were unsuccessful. The 31st fought on May 22, which led to three men being killed and nineteen wounded. Burke came out of the battle unscathed.³

Grant's army laid siege to Vicksburg for nearly seven weeks before the rebel forces surrendered on July 4. The following day Sherman marched his men east to Jackson in pursuit of Confederate troops commanded by General Joseph E. Johnston. The 31st met resistance at several points along the road to Jackson but suffered no casualties. On July 17 the regiment reached Canton, Mississippi, where they engaged in a major skirmish and took the town. The 31st entered Jackson on the 20th and remained in the city until July 23. Before departing, the men took part in the destruction of the railway network and buildings in and around the city. They set up camp east of Vicksburg at Big Black River Station on July 27. The regiment encamped there until September 22, when Sherman moved his men to Vicksburg and transported his command to Memphis, Tennessee. Burke arrived at the city's port on the night of September 27.⁴

Within two days the regiment was again on the move, this time to Corinth, Mississippi, where it encamped until October 11. From Corinth they marched to Iuka and to Cherokee Station on October 19. For the next eight days the 31st skirmished with rebels at Pine Knob, Cane Creek and Tuscumbia, Alabama. On October 30 the regiment crossed the Tennessee River at Chickasaw Landing and began their 218 mile march eastward to Chattanooga. They bypassed the besieged city and reached the base of Lookout Mountain on November 23rd. Burke was assigned as the regimental baker and detached from the rest of

the unit to gather and assist in the transport of supplies from storehouses further west.⁵

While Burke was on detached duty, his regiment camped in the shadow of Lookout Mountain in Raccoon Valley. Private John Rath, Company B of the 31st Iowa, wrote in his diary upon arriving: "The clouds that overhung us for so long now disappeared toward morning and the proud and famous Lookout Mountain could be plainly seen with its hundreds of campfires. It rose up above all the other smaller mountains, a beautiful sight to behold."

The following afternoon that striking image of beauty changed to one of horror and bloodshed.⁶ On the morning of November 24, the 31st advanced up the western slope of Lookout Mountain under the command of Brigadier General Peter J. Osterhaus. They met heavy fire as men slowly climbed over huge rocks and stumbled down crevasses on the steep jagged surface of the mountain. A dense fog limited their vision but they pressed onward through scattered enemy fire. By late afternoon the regiment was below Lookout Point when the Confederate line emerged from the mist and fired directly into their ranks. Four men went down wounded, one mortally. For two hours the men of the 31st exchanged fire before the enemy fell back. As the sun set the regiment organized their lines and prepared for a long cold night under arms. At about 10 p.m. a line of grey coats charged the Union lines but were repelled. Two more attempts were made by the Confederates but the 31st held their ground.⁷

The next morning Osterhaus' division was ordered to Missionary Ridge. They reached the southern point of the ridge on the Rossville road at about 4:00 p.m. and advanced up the ridge. The 31st found the enemy behind temporary breastworks. The men charged and after an hour of heated battle the outnumbered Confederates retreated in disorder. They followed in pursuit until dusk. At daybreak of November 27, the regiment marched toward Ringgold, Georgia. At 9:00 a.m. they entered

the town after a short battle with rebel skirmishers and cavalry at Taylor's Ridge. The 31st continued the chase to nearby White Oak Mountain but reinforced defenders stopped them in their tracks and drove them back. The pursuit ended and the regiment returned to Ringgold. They departed the town for Chattanooga four days later.⁸

Burke rejoined his unit at Raccoon Valley on December 1. The next day the regiment was ordered to Bridgeport, Alabama where they arrived on December 5. Just before Christmas, the 31st broke camp and moved to Woodville, Alabama to set up winter quarters. It was at Woodville that Burke began again to write his family.⁹

On January 15, 1864 Burke wrote his mother Harriet from what he referred to as his "Mountain Home" at Woodville.

Mother, you are already aware from my letters that we have gone into winter quarters. It really seems like a new business for us renegades of rebel territories to get into camp once again. I think we will spend the remainder of the winter in our present camp. The boys have fixed themselves comfortably by building log houses, fire places, and other contrivances of comfort that the situation and ingenuity of a soldier would dictate. You would think certainly "Necessity is the mother of invention" should you chance visit our quarters. But I must not forget to make mention of our newly erected bake shop, which we moved into yesterday. Said edifice is constituted of logs, in size about 18 by 20 feet, with a regular ancient fireplace. A more comfortable and suitable place could not be thought of. If everybody will keep on their own side of the fence we may be in it some time, but if they don't I would not promise a very long sojourn in this place.

Of the people and nearby surroundings he wrote his younger brother Samuel S. Wylie, who was attending theology school at Washington College, on January 17.

Well, Samuel, there is no church for me to attend down here (to use a common expression) "In this God forsaken country." It is a rare thing to see a schoolhouse or a meeting house, and all of them are the most inferior buildings the country affords. They remind me very much of our ancient log schoolhouses which long ago been torn down and in their stead noble structures have been erected. And it tells very plainly on the natives that they have been neglected as to the one thing needful. Taking the people of the south as a class, they are very ignorant indeed. The poorest and most common people in the north are better educated and informed than they. Where is the southern chivalry and refinement they used to boast so loud and long about? Like many other things, it never existed.

On January 24 Burke responded to his older brother Robert D. Wylie, a professor of mathematics at Washington College, regarding the differences between the Union soldiers from the east and those from the west.

You spoke of defending the soldiers and not the generals of the Potomac Army. A very wise conclusion indeed, but still I want to see the defense and hope you will be liberal enough to write it. I don't blame them for falling back to Culpepper every time the supply of butter and straw fails, provided those luxuries can be obtained there. One of the Potomacs told one of our boys (confidentially) that he had never been longer than five days without his regular butter until they got down in this department. Still I will admit their fighting qualities are good and if rightly used would amount to a great deal in putting down the Rebellion. I noticed the editors of numerous northern papers are predicting a collapse of the Confederacy by spring. I hope their predictions may not prove groundless. At the same time, the soldiers expect another campaign next spring. As

long as the rebels hold Richmond, Charleston, Atlanta and Mobile they will endeavor to hold out.

He continued to write his older brother about the weather in Alabama.

The idea of there being two feet of snow at Chattanooga is an absurd one. At no time yet this winter was there more than one inch of snow on the ground. Last week there was snow enough to track rabbits one morning. I went out and shot three and we had a mess of Baked-Confederate-Rabbits. They tasted very well. Suppose all the treason was cooked out of them. The Weather Clerk has pleased the Union Army to a nicety with his arrangement of weather this winter so far. It is cold enough to freeze the ground a little at night and clear and warm through the day. Of late there has been little rain, consequently mud is getting scarce, but a day or two may bring a new supply. Although it is very pleasant to get clear of the cold, I would prefer a colder climate than this for health. But this is the most healthy place we have been yet. Only a few of the Reg't report sick. Almost daily soldiers who have been sick in the northern hospitals are returning to the Reg't. There are some new recruits for the 31st Iowa at Davenport. Two commissioned officers and four enlisted men start there for them in a few days. At present the 31st is running up instead of down.

On the upcoming presidential election he wrote.

You wished to know who the soldiers would desire as President. My knowledge is limited, but I believe if Abraham Lincoln was nominated, there would be almost a unanimous vote for him among the soldiers. I never remember of a time when there was so little said against the course of the

President as since Lincoln took his seat, and you know if there was cause there would be complaint.

Burke wrote to his brother Robert on February 14 on price inflations and pleasant winter conditions in the South.

This is the Sabbath and to some extent it is observed as such in the Army. We are not baking today, nor do we do so unless circumstances make it a necessity. I have had a good time this winter, had no trouble, got along peaceably with everybody but a few exceptions, although my position is a troublesome one at times. It is a difficult task to satisfy the demands of a Reg't of hungry men when rations are scarce or circumstances unfavorable. Baking material is very scarce and high as my price list will show. Dried fruits 25 cents per lb., hops from \$1.00 to \$1.50 per lb., soda 50 cents and 75 cents per lb.; butter sells at 75 cents per lb. but one thing in its favour, it is so strong it is worth more than your butter up in the States. High prices are caused by the scarcity of transportation. You people in the United States are very foolish for not coming down to the sunny south to live in a climate that is more congenial to the comforts of mankind. Really we have enjoyed the most pleasant winter weather I ever experienced; dry and warm, sometimes not cold enough to freeze at night; the days are as a general thing uncomfortably warm. The natives say this has been an uncommon nice winter. But judging them by their outward appearance, I should say that it would be difficult to decide whether they could mind what transpired that long ago.

Burke becomes far more critical of his southern hosts further in the letter.

The cause of this Rebellion can easily be traced back to ignorance by anyone who has spent a few months in the Southern States. Ignorance and superstition and bigotry reign supreme throughout the Confederacy or at least any portion I have been in or heard tell of. A young lady (whose family lives close by our camp) told one of my companions a few days since that it was a rare thing to see a young man or girl in this vicinity who could write their name. She was requested by our "Yankee" to write off a few verses of a song she was so kind and liberal to sing for him. He says his flirtation was ended by her confessing with many blushes that she could not write. Some of the advantages and beauties of the institutions peculiar to this country are becoming visible to our minds and we can't help but see them, although we try to guard against investigating into their private affairs as much as possible. Some of our plain talking boys go as far as to say that this is and always has been a God forsaken country and that he never knew there was such a people existed or lived in the manner they have done or he would have destroyed them long ago. These are the sentiments of another.

Before concluding he mentioned new camp activities.

The boys amuse themselves in various ways in camp. We have a full string band, game chickens and all manner of games ever invented are brought into requisition and time passes away swiftly because nearly all are well and full of fun.

His father received a letter from Burke on February 24. In that letter he explained the effects of the war on his regiment and the confidence that the men had in General Sherman.

The 31st Iowa has more men present now than any other in the Division, and it only draws rations for 358 men. So you will perceive our Regiments are badly used up. While in regiments of the 16th Army Corps (that have been guarding the railroad east of Memphis) there are from six to eight hundred men each. When we came through Corinth, Mississippi, we chanced to meet with the 39th Iowa, which Reg't was formed at Camp Herron the same time the 31st was formed. The 39th had 840 men fit for duty and the 31st had 230 men. Both Regm'ts had been out the same length of time, but we had been marching and fighting and they had been guarding railroads, quartered all the time in comfortable barracks. Already the campaign in the southwest has been begun by Maj. Gen'l Sherman, marching directly east (with two Army Corps) from Vicksburg towards Meridian. All here are confident that Sherman will meet with success in his grand undertaking. There are few better Gen'ls than Sherman. Destruction to the Rebels is his "motto" and he has enough Iowa soldiers along with him to carry out his design.

A week later, on March 3, Burke wrote his mother to explain recent duties he performed as regimental baker.

I have been on detached duty for six months past, consequently during that time have been my own "boss." The position I have been and am now filling is one that might be criticized or to be more definite, the character of the person might be criticized. During the time I have superintended the Regimental Bakery I have collected and paid out a deal over a thousand dollars of regimental money, and if I had been so minded could have used any amount for personal purposes without anyone knowing it, as I keep my own cash accounts. But lessons of honesty taught me in my early years would not so much as allow

the opportunity a temptation. Well, Mother, to make a long story short, from what I know I have reason to believe that my credit is as good now in the 31st as when I took charge of the bakery.

Burke's eldest brother Tappan Wylie, a sheep farmer residing in Washington County, Pennsylvania, received a letter from Woodville on April 7. From earlier correspondence the older brother offered advice to the younger regarding a young lady. Burke gave this response.

Brother, there is another all important subject (to which you alluded) to which I will call your worthy attention for a short time. Judging from a personal knowledge of your very great propensities and particular like for "ladies," it does not come with good grace for you to select a course for me and advise me to take immediate action concerning a certain young lady (Miss J—). You even go so far as to say (or to threaten) that if I don't do something soon, you will. Now I think it is high time you would put the threat into execution and for once do something. But by way of advice (if you think you can and must do "something") — take care you don't infringe on the Soldier's rights. Don't infer from my remarks that you can in any way make an intrusion on my personal "rights". I speak for all soldiers. Your suggestion was a good one, but owing to circumstances you know I cannot approve of it. Besides I was highly pleased and flattered with the selection you chose to make, which shows you have a comprehensive mind and are altogether capable of giving wise counsel. Wise counsel should receive attention, so I think I will try and do "something" myself.

The tedium of camp life was addressed in a letter to his brother Robert on April 10.

Well, Robert, I have just returned from a ramble on the mountain at the foot of which our camp lies. My company consisted of Burke, myself and a fellow by the name of Wylie, a party selected for the occasion. I tell you there is something grand and overpowering in the appearance of these mountains. I like to steal an hour away among the silent rocks, away from the noise and confusion of camp and be alone for a time to meditate on the past, present and future. I get tired of the monotony of camp at times, or listening to the repetition of some favorite amusements with the boys. In this respect, I may be differently constituted from other people. But the continual boisterous amusements common in camp are tiring to me. In a previous letter to some of the family I stated that we expected to march before long. However, we are here yet and will draw ten days rations of flour tomorrow. So I don't think we are ready to move yet.

The following week he wrote his father in dismay regarding the lack of observation of the Sabbath by some soldiers, the incompetence of Army officers and the indolence of the inhabitants.

Dear Father,

This is Sabbath morning and to some extent is observed as such. Nothing but necessary duties are required of the soldier on Sabbath while in camp. But many would be better employed drilling than in the manner in which they observe the day. Card-playing and gambling for money in other ways are the ruling passion of camp life and it is not altogether confined to the soldiers alone. The officers spend more time at playing cards than doing duties.

Why it is so, I cannot tell, but the man who can drink the most liquor and swear the biggest oath is the very man who is most likely to be promoted to some important position of trust and responsibility and honor. I believe this is the great cause of so many disasters and failures to our cause. While on the march at different times, I have seen one brigade commander so drunk he could hardly ride a horse and at the same time expecting to meet the enemy. The drunken judgment of many a commander has been the cause of the loss of hundreds of useful and valuable lives during the present war. We are beginning to think that the 15th Army Corps is not going to the front this spring, but will remain on duty as guards for the R. Road. But an order from Gen'l Sherman may make a change in calculations. There is nothing going on here now worthy of note, even of late we are deprived of the excitement of firing on the picket line. Sometime since the division was called out two nights in one week to resist a supposed attack on the pickets. But like the "Irishman shearing the pig," there was more noise than wool.

Father, I think you would discharge the last boy you have if they dared to make such awful awkward attempts at farming as the citizens do down here. They are the most careless and slovenly set of farmers I ever saw. In ploughing ground for planting cotton, they do not plow all the ground, but throw two furrows together and plant the cotton on the ridge formed by throwing the furrows together. They use wooden ploughs, pointed with iron. The Negro women work out in the fields just as the men do. Not long since I saw three wenches and six male Negroes plowing together with mule teams in one field. This one of the greatest countries for peach trees I ever saw. They grow spontaneously along the sides and foot of the mountains. If we remain here this summer we will have plenty of that delicious fruit to eat. The weather is getting warm here. Vegetation is putting forth

quite fast. The trees are beginning to look green, some have full-sized leaves on them. It takes far more warm weather to start vegetation in the South than North. The 31st Iowa is enjoying good health, only one death has occurred since the battle at Chattanooga.

As winter turned to spring, the anticipation of returning to battle became more evident in Burke's letters home. Burke wrote his brother Robert on April 28 that he expected his regiment to be on the march soon. He also mentioned the massacre at Fort Pillow that occurred a little over two weeks earlier.

We may expect to hear of some of the hardest fighting of the war being done this spring. The Rebs appear determined to conquer or die in the attempt, but their efforts will be in vain. I hope Grant will be successful with the Potomac Army. Whatever the result may be, it will either lengthen or terminate the war. The enemy appears to use every means, whether in accordance with the laws of war or not, to accomplish their hellish designs. Fort Pillow and the awful outrages committed there afford us good example of the future policy of the war. A policy the Confederate leaders will resort to in the dying struggles of Rebellion. Their late acts show clearly that their enterprise is about to fail. We hope it may and soon, too. Yesterday our orders were to take all our camp and garrison equipage, but this morning orders are to take nothing but what we can carry. If the latter order is carried out, we may expect to travel like so many greyhounds.

The orders to break camp were issued two days later and on May 1 the 31st Iowa was en route to Georgia. The regiment marched along the valley roads of northeast Alabama and southeast Tennessee reaching Chattanooga later in the week.

Upon reaching Snake Creek Gap, Georgia, the 31st encountered the enemy on May 9 and took part in the Battle of Rocky Face Ridge. Finding the Confederate defenses too strong, Sherman's Army stopped and pulled back. Two days later Sherman pressed forward as General Johnston entrenched his troops north and west of Resaca, Georgia. On May 13, Sherman advanced upon Resaca. The next day the 15th Army Corps, including the 31st Iowa, attacked the left wing of Johnston's army. The 31st supported the assault that captured the elevated ground before the town. By the end of the day the battle ended in a stalemate. Sherman launched another attack on the 15th. The 31st was ordered to defend the hill it had taken the day before. They skirmished with Confederates most of day but received no casualties. Johnston ordered the evacuation of Resaca late that evening fearing Sherman would flank his position.¹⁰

Burke writes his brother Robert from Kingston, Georgia on May 19 on the events of the battle.

Well, Brother, I am still enjoying good health, for which I should be thankful. We have been on the march since the 1st of May except two and one-half days spent in fighting the Rebels at Resaca. Dear Brother, I am very thankful to inform you that I have been through another battle without receiving a scratch. The enemy evacuated their stronghold at Dalton on May 12th and on the 13th the 15th Corps engaged them at Resaca. We made the advance at one o'clock and were under enemy fire until morning of the 16th, at which time they evacuated, leaving us in possession of one of the best fortified places I ever saw. After taking possession of Resaca we started the same morning southward and have continued to advance on the Reb's rear ever since. I forgot to mention our loss in killed and wounded. The division lost 120 men. The 31st Iowa 8, two of them killed and wounded. Co. K did not lose a man. We are pressing close on the Rebel's rear and expect to do so

until he makes a stand, and then the calculation is to whip and capture his army. Johnston's army is already demoralized to some extent. However, he manages to keep his men from deserting very much, by putting his best troops on rear guard and telling them that there will be no quarters shown them if they come in our lines, but quite a number have come already. We hear good news from Grant's army, and you may expect stirring times in this department for some time. I have not heard from home since the 12th of April. We get mail but seldom and have no chance of mailing letters. Our Captain has resigned and will take this with him to Nashville.

On the afternoon of the 15th of May I fired 74 shots at the Rebs while skirmishing. Sometimes they dropped their bullets very close, but none of them hit me. I am finishing this by moonlight, and close by sending my love to you all, Good Bye.

Sherman closely followed Johnston's retreat. On the 17th, the 31st skirmished with the Confederate rear guard near Adairsville, Georgia. Johnston continued to withdraw his troops toward Atlanta. With his supply line vulnerable and overextended, Sherman shortened his supply line and rested the men of XV Corps. The 31st encamped near Kingston from May 19 to May 23 while the rest of Sherman's Army pressed on to Cassville, Georgia.¹¹

Burke wrote to his brother Robert from Kingston on May 22.

Robert, there are some of the most superb plantation houses in this part of the country. The houses and surroundings are in some cases fixed up in a princely style. But how has all this wealth been gained – by the buying and selling of human flesh. And how they are reaping the reward of their work! It makes me feel sad to witness the

destruction of these beautiful homes, although I know the occupants are disloyal enough to shoot down a U. S. soldier. Perhaps you wonder 'ere that I don't say something about our movements and the army. I know but little of what is going on outside the 15th Corps, and could communicate little more than reports, and should not like to vouch for the truthfulness of half we hear. I know the first division is camped in a wheat field one mile west of Kingston, and that I have erected a structure of rails with brush and leaves on top to make a shade, and I am writing this letter laid on my knapsack, which will in part account for such bad writing. There is a very large army here in this vicinity under command of T. W. Sherman. There are a number of armies composed of from one to three corps, each commanded by different generals under command of Sherman. The following generals command different armies present: Generals McPherson, Schofield, Thomas, Hooker. Also the cavalry which were commanded by the famous Killpatrick. I saw Gen. Killpatrick a short time after he was wounded. The 31st Iowa was assigned to the position in line of battle which had been occupied by Killpatrick's force. Co. K marched over while in line, the horse which was shot at the same time the General was, and on which he was riding. You may expect news from this quarter and will hear of hard fighting if Johnston concludes to show Sherman a fight. We have driven him out of his strong fortifications and his chosen battleground, and can whip him again.

On the morning of May 23, the 31st broke camp and marched twenty miles to Peak Springs. High temperatures plagued the regiment as they advanced to Dallas, Georgia. Private Rath wrote in diary on the 24th, "Weather hot and a good many of our boys received fatal injuries". One soldier of the 31st died of a heat stroke. They reached outskirts of Dallas on the 25th and began skirmishing with rebels. The struggle to

take the town increased on the 26th. The 15th Corps dug in on the 27th. The enemy, attempting to find a weakness in the Union lines, charged the trenches of the 15th Corps on the 28th. The bluecoats held their ground despite a series of assaults that lasted until the evening hours.¹²

From a rifle pit east of Dallas, Burke writes to his brother Robert on May 29.

I attempt to write you a few lines under peculiar circumstances which might have been far different from what they are now. Three days ago our army arrived in front of Dallas and found the enemy there in force. But as usual we drove them until nearly dark, when they made a determined stand posted on a high hill covered with heavy timber. The 2nd Brigade 1st Division advanced and took a position in a deep ravine at the foot of the hill on which the Rebels were drawn up in line, and then advanced and gained about half of the hill, at which place we remained till daylight next morning, May 27th. Co. K was on picket the night of the 26th and stood within a few yards of the Rebel line of battle for a short time until fired into by the Rebel line. It was an awful fire and only a few yards apart. I cannot see how the boys escaped at all – only one was killed and one wounded, but none of my Co. was touched. Next morning at daylight the enemy began to make a flank movement on the left of our brigade. (Co. K was placed on the extreme left of the skirmish line.) Through some mistake the 2nd Brigade and the 2nd Div. of the 16th Corps did not join together. The 2nd Brigade being nearly half a mile in advance of the right of the 16th Army Corps, and the enemy found this out during the night and a short time after daylight (the 27th), advanced a Brigade on our extreme left between us and the 16th Army Corps. Well the consequence was we skirmishers had to take leg back for security and get out of that under a fire from on three sides of us, and

then came near being captured. But the 1st Iowa and 31st Iowa changed front by falling back on the left of the Brigade and the two Reg'ts stood their ground and by one of those noble and almost superhuman efforts repulsed the whole Rebel Brigade and held their ground until ordered to fall back. Our loss was not large, but the Rebs left numbers of dead men on that ground.

This brings us to the 28th, as nothing of importance occurred during the afternoon of the 27th. At about 4 o'clock yesterday (28th) the Rebels charged our whole front of the 20th, 16th and 15th Army Corps and was repulsed at every point with terrible slaughter, as our men had dug rifle pits in which they were securely stationed and waited until the enemy came within a few feet of the pits before firing a gun. Then poured in a tremendous fire and compelled the Rebs to give way and fall back in awful disorder leaving hundreds of dead and wounded in our possession. Our Gen'ls say they never saw such destruction of lives as the enemy met with on yesterday. It equals the repulse our forces met with on the 22nd of May last year at Vicksburg. Our loss is comparatively small considering the nature of the desperate charge made on our lines. During the charge our Brigade was used as a reserve and double quicked to all weak points. Sometimes we were in the firing line of rifle pits, then would be ordered to some other point where the enemy was pressing our men the hardest. I never was so fatigued in my life, but succeeded in keeping pace with the Reg't. The 3rd Brigade lost but a few men, I don't know the exact number killed and wounded. The 4th Division, 15th Corps, lost some 75 or 80 in killed and wounded. I have not ascertained the loss of the 1st Division, but don't think it great. We have been changed from the left to the right of the 15th Corps and away from the rest of the 1st Division.

Well, Robert, we have great reason to be thankful for the favorable result of yesterday's fighting to our cause. How soon the enemy may again attempt to charge us, I don't know, but think we took the wire edge off them yesterday. Today, Sunday, all quiet along the front except sharp-shooting. We have engaged all day in building breastworks and will agree to settle the rebellion right here if the Rebs will only do the charging, provided the God of Battle will continue to favor us as in times past. May we be successful, is my prayer, and our cause succeed.

The 31st remained in the vicinity of Dallas until the morning of June 1 when they abandoned their lines near Dallas and marched to New Hope Church. They remained there until June 5 after Confederates withdrew to Kennesaw Mountain. On the June 6 the regiment marched to Ackworth then to Big Shanty on June 10. By the 15th they were in the trenches below Kennesaw Mountain.¹³ While in a rifle pit five mile south of Ackworth, Burke wrote his brother Robert of the rise in rebel desertions.

Brother, this is the seventh day the fighting has been going on here. My Reg't was on train guard till the morning of the 15th, then we were relieved and went into the front rifle pits. Soon after a charge was ordered on the enemy's advanced line of works. Three companies of the 31st were ordered out to form a heavy skirmish line. (Co. K was not called on). The skirmish line assisted by a heavy artillery fire carried the works in fine style with but little loss. The Rebs seemed to think after the attack was made "a man who runs away, may live to fight another day." During the afternoon we advanced a half-mile and entrenched ourselves. The whole line advanced during the day. The loss on our side was light, as our skirmishers did all the fighting. The Rebel loss was heavy, not in killed and

wounded, but by prisoners from desertions. In front of the 26th Iowa Reg't, 1st Division, 63 deserters came in. Some places the whole Rebel line for a distance would throw down their arms and break on the keen run for our lines. Every time a squad would come in our boys would receive them in cheers and make them welcome. I have not heard an estimate of the number of prisoners, but think I would be safe in saying that over 1,000 were taken by the 15th Corps. Wherever their lines were pressed the hardest, there they deserted the most. The Rebels have been made to believe all the time during this campaign that we would take no prisoners, but shoot every man – but of late they have found out differently and act accordingly.

The Union and Confederate lines dug in deeper along the foot of Kennesaw Mountain and tested each others defenses from June 15 to June 28. The 15th Army Corps saw action on June 27 as Sherman ordered a full frontal assault upon Johnston's trenches. The 31st was held in reserve but did receive some casualties. Sherman's attempt to dislodge Johnston from Kennesaw Mountain failed miserably.¹⁴ Six days before the battle Burke was detached from his unit and sent to Chattanooga to retrieve official paperwork for the regiment. When he returned on June 29, he wrote his brother Robert on his many trips to Chattanooga and the rebel defenses upon Kennesaw Mountain.

It has been some days since I wrote you. The reason for this unusual occurrence, I was away from "home" or the Reg't for seven days; during that time had no good opportunity to write. I was detailed to go to Chattanooga June 21st for blanks and muster rolls for the Reg't. (One noncommissioned officer went from each Reg't in the brigade). We were two days and nights running from Big Shanty Station to Chattanooga – 112 miles. The road is a good one, but there are so many trains on it going to and

from the front loaded with forage and rations, in connection with this the Rebel Cavalry tear up the track at some point north of this place almost every day. However, all the important bridges are strongly guarded so that the road can be repaired soon after damage. I saw four trains that had been thrown off the track and burned. Returning from Chattanooga there were three trains running together. I was on the second and middle train. A squad of Rebel cavalry – 25 men – took up the track and threw the locomotive and three cars of the train a short distance ahead of ours, then shot into the soldiers riding in the cars – wounded one man badly. Our boys returned the fire promptly and the Rebs skedaddled. It took nine hours to get the train on the track and the road repaired. It inclines to raise a fellow's hair to be run off the track and fired into at the middle of the night with the prospect of being captured by a band of guerrillas or southern horse thieves. To conclude the Chattanooga trip – I got the things I was sent for, had a pleasant trip and arrived here after an absence of eight days. By being away I got out of a very ugly scrap with the Rebels on the 27th. The 15th Army Corps made a charge on the enemy's works that day and carried them successfully. At some points our men were compelled to fall back owing to the enemy having an enfilading fire on the line. The 2nd and 4th Divisions of the 15th Corps lost a good many men. As the 1st Division was only supporting the other two, it did not suffer near so heavy a loss of men. Five men of the 31st were wounded, none of them, however, belonged to Co. K. Our works and the enemy are very close together. They occupy the Kennesaw Mts. and the hills around the base of the mountains. The Rebs can look right down on us (with disgust) and we can return the compliment in the shape of 20 lb. shells. They cannot depress their guns enough to shell us very badly in our present position, as we are close around the base of the mountain.

The 31st returned to their trenches before Kennesaw Mountain as Sherman continued his efforts to flank Johnston's army. On the night of July 2 Johnston evacuated Kennesaw Mountain and withdrew to the south bank of the Chattahoochee River. The following morning the 15th Corps marched in pursuit and occupied the city of Marietta, Georgia. On Independence Day the 31st advanced to the Chattahoochee River and set up fortifications. They remained there exchanging musket and cannon rounds with Confederates until July 12.¹⁵ It was from these fortifications that Burke wrote his mother on July 11.

Well, Mother, we are still (as the Rebel papers say) retreating, but right straight for Atlanta. The Rebels are "advancing" in that direction also, as our advance guard. Our efforts have been successful in trying to drive the enemy. He now occupies the south bank of the Chattahoochee River and we the North side. I am not sure that our Army has effected a crossing yet, but know when Sherman gets ready he will cross his Army. Perhaps we are mistaken, but this Army under command of Gen'l Sherman has an idea that he is one of the best and most able generals of the time. He has led his Army through and overcome difficulties that would have demoralized and discouraged an ancient general. And still we have not possession of the City of Atlanta yet, nor do we know how soon that eventful day will arrive. I have noticed some strange incidents during the campaign, some of them worthy of note if space would admit. One evening the Rebels and our men were keeping up a very brisk skirmish, and after dark amidst the firing you could distinctly hear the singing and praying at three different points of the Rebel line of battle, of whom part were engaged skirmishing. They appear to have become religious of late. Almost every night we can hear them holding their prayer meetings – but I do not place much

confidence in their pretensions. Men who act as they have done on different occasions when opportunity offered, cannot possess a spark of religion. I know it to be a candid fact that they murdered in cold blood some of our men last May. They also make it a rule to shoot our litterbearers while engaged in taking off our dead and wounded. A few days ago a sergeant of my Co. was on the skirmish line and ordered to advance with the skirmish line. When our boys had charged their skirmish pits and were close up to the Rebs, one of them jumped up – fired at one of the nearest men of my Reg't (but missed him) then began pleading to not shoot, he would surrender without resistance. The Serg't says he tried to kill the Union soldier after there was no chance to escape. They often do this trick – wait till we get close up, fire into us, then surrender.

Contrary to the heartless enemy mentioned above, he wrote in the same letter of Union and Confederate soldiers meeting socially along the front lines.

One of my Co. has just returned from the Skirmish line. He says the Rebs and our boys have had a regular jollification this afternoon. The Rebs are on the south of the river and ours on the north, but this afternoon they mutually concluded to have a sociable time. Some together, traded knives, clothing and everything generally. Shook hands and parted good friends, to begin shooting again as soon as both parties would get to their respective pits.

The 31st was detailed to guard the corps' supply trains from July 14 to August 2.¹⁶ Burke wrote his brother Samuel from Roswell, Georgia on July 18 describing his duties and the activities of Sherman's Army.

Well, Samuel, we have been enjoying ourselves finely the past three days. My Reg't has been detailed as an escort for supply trains going from this point to Marietta, our present base of supplies. We have to guard all the trains belonging to the 15th Army Corps, but so far it has been very light duty. Four companies have just returned from a trip to Marietta and my Co. will likely have to go today or tomorrow. Roswell is a little town situated about 20 miles northeast of Atlanta and 12 miles east of Marietta on the Chattahoochee River. A few days ago the Army of the Tennessee occupied a position on the Chattahoochee River and on the extreme right of Sherman's Army. Since that time we have changed positions and now occupy a position on the left. When on the right we were within ten miles of Atlanta. Now we are 20 miles from it. But by moving to the left we have effected a crossing of the river without loss, which could not have been done in front of the fortified enemy, and have out flanked their strong works along the river so that Johnston & Company will have to evacuate them. How soon Atlanta will be in our possession we don't know, but think the campaign will not end until it does fall. The 16th Army Corps was in the advance on arriving at this point, found a Rebel force on the opposite side of the river, which had burned the bridge and intended to dispute the crossing of our forces. But a brigade of the 16th Corps soon solved the difficulty. They formed a line along the river bank and actually charged right through the river. Happily for them the water was only waist deep. The river is about 225 yards wide, but very shallow. The Rebs were so astounded at this daring movement they only fired a few shots and then "skedaddled" for a more healthy locality. The Brigade band marched out into the middle of the river and mounted up to a big rock and played for the boys while they advanced on the enemy. At present we are camped in a nice grove at the edge of town.

Five days after writing his brother Samuel, Burke scribbled a short message in camp at Roswell to his brother Tappan.

Day before yesterday a Serg't of Co. B 31st Iowa was taken prisoner. The Reg't moved camp from the north side to the south side of the river. Co. B could not take all their stuff such as rations, cooking utensils, etc., with them. The unfortunate Serg't stayed with the stuff till some of them would return and help carry it to the Co. But on going back they found Mr. Serg't had been captured and carried away by a squad of Reb cavalry who were on the lookout for a chance to catch a Yankee straggler. We are allowed double rations of blackberries on condition we gather them ourselves. I went out yesterday on an expedition against the Confederate Blackberries and succeeded in satisfying the demands of the inner man and bringing a quantity in camp for my mess mates. We have to go armed and ready for a fight at the shortest notice. The berries are outside the picket line and there are numerous bands of guerrillas hovering around the picket line ready to shoot down our boys when an opportunity offers. Last evening we received the unfavorable news that Gen. McPherson was killed.** Don't know if the report is true or not. Hope it is only a report. If true, our cause has lost one of her best generals and soldiers. We are 20 miles from the front, so I cannot give you any news, only by report, they are so exaggerated and often wrong that I will not repeat what has been rumored.*

* The soldier taken prisoner was Sergeant Francis F. Fitkins of Company B, 31st Iowa.

** Major General James Birdseye McPherson was shot and killed at the Battle of Bald Hill, outside of Atlanta, on July 22.

Before concluding his letter to his brother Tappan, he wrote of his concerns regarding not being paid in over six months.

We have not been paid for over six months, but will likely get paid before long, as soon as Atlanta is taken. Our wages have been raised – privates \$16 per month, corporals \$18 per month, sergeants \$20. With gold selling \$2.35, our wages are not large. But money is a minor point and the least talked about with the soldiers. The termination of the war is something that interests the soldiers' attention.

While the 31st guarded the supply trains, Sherman split his army into three columns for the assault on Atlanta. Johnston, unable to prevent the Union advances, was replaced by General John Bell Hood on the evening of July 17. Three days later Hood attacked one of Sherman's columns at a place called Peachtree Creek. A determined Union force held back several courageous Confederate assaults. On July 22 Hood made another effort to break the Union line at Bald Hill. The Confederates had initial success by partially collapsing Sherman's left flank but a fierce counter attack prevented a victory for Hood. On July 27 the 31st Iowa was ordered to guard the supply trains at Vining's Station, Georgia about ten miles from the front lines. Within twenty-four hours Hood struck the Union right at Ezra Church but was repulsed with heavy casualties.¹⁷ Burke wrote his brother Robert a day after the battle from Vining's Station.

We are camped now within three miles of the place we occupied on the 12th of July before the Army of the Tennessee moved to the left or near the Railroad Bridge across the Chattahoochee River. My Reg't is still on train guard or is in the rear to protect and escort the trains to different points. The Tennessee Army is moving on to the right wing of the present line of battle and we had to move with the train to the rear of the Army. Well, Brother, from what I can learn by report from the front (although I cannot

believe all reports) there has been harder fighting done on the 22nd of July and since than at any time during the campaign. The Army of the Tennessee had shown to the Rebels and to the world that it is composed of the best fighting material and did contend with the enemy at a disadvantage near Decatur, the result of which was a heavy loss of life and prisoners to the enemy. Since I began writing a reliable man has returned from the front. He reports the most desperate fighting on both the right and left wings. It seems the Command of McPherson has got into it again after moving to the right. The Rebs came out of their works and charged our army a number of times, trying to prevent our men from getting a position and fortifying. The 15th A. C. was engaged and lost a good many men in killed and wounded. Yesterday, the 15th, 16th, 17th Army Corps were engaged in musketry fighting from 8 a.m. till 3 p.m. Report says during that time our army repulsed several charges of the enemy on the open field and inflicted a heavy loss in killed and wounded. My Brigade lost a good many men at Decatur. One of my Co. was wounded slightly by a piece of shell at Decatur (while on train guard) during the battle there. The Rebs came near capturing our supply at Decatur and at one time had it surrounded. The cavalry are on another great raid to the rear of Atlanta. That is the Macon Road. What the result will be is certain. Atlanta will fall, but how soon is the question. I hope by the next time I write to you I can have the pleasure of telling you I have been in the city.

The 31st rejoined the 15th Army Corps on August 2 and were in the trenches before Atlanta on August 5. Sherman continued to extend his lines around the city attempting to cut off Hood's army from what remained of the Confederacy.¹⁸ Three miles west of Atlanta, Burke writes his brother Robert of the impending capture of the city.

My health still continues good, better than some of my comrades. Some of my Company have had the ague for eight months, doing duty all the time except when the worst. My Company went on the skirmish line this morning at 4 a.m. – I am writing now seated in the skirmish pit. We have good pits and are, in a manner, safe. The skirmishing is not very brisk on the lines this morning, owing likely to the fact that this is Sunday morning. The Rebs generally shoot less on Sabbath than other days, and our boys generally shoot about 5 times as much as they do. The 2nd Brigade, 1st Division, moved into the front line and relieved a portion of the 23rd Corps; supposed they will go off to the right and attempt to outflank the enemy. We can still hear the Rebel cars running in Atlanta. All the roads have been cut, but likely some of them have been repaired again, or else they are running out to where the road was cut. It is the general supposition that Johnston's army is evacuating Atlanta. Prisoners taken two days ago say they are evacuating as fast as possible. Their papers say they are evacuating and will leave nothing for the Yankees but empty buildings. A few days may make a change in Johnston's calculations about leaving his present stronghold. Sherman will consult his own pleasure about the length of time and may want possession before his opponent Joseph feels so inclined.

The Union lines made slow but steady gains. On August 11 and August 13, Burke's regiment assaulted rebel picket lines and advanced with the rest of the 15th Army Corps toward Atlanta.¹⁹ He wrote to his father a day after the last assault.

Our lines are being contracted daily and are now getting close to those of the enemy. We gained a complete victory over the Rebs yesterday, although some might not term it a victory over the Rebs because our loss was so

very small. We advance the skirmish line in front of the 15th, 23rd and 14th Army Corps and captured nearly all their skirmish line. It was a grand and yet an awful sight to see our brave boys respond to the "Forward-March" bugles' note blown as a signal. The whole line moved forward in fine style at the signal. The Rebel skirmishers were apparently stupefied by the movement, for they hardly fired a shot till our boys were close enough to demand them as prisoners, to which request they readily assented. You should have seen our boys advancing on doublequick and the rebels running into our lines, apparently glad of an opportunity to do so. From different sources I learned that 500 or more were captured in this way. Our skirmishers soon remodeled their works or changed their front with the "spade" and now occupy them. This new position gained gives us a decided advantage of ground. Since I commenced writing the skirmishers have got into a row and have been firing at a dreadful rate. The artillery men also took an active part. A piece of shell struck close enough while I was eating supper to knock dirt in my coffee. But we think – a miss is as good as a mile. Reports say that Gen'l Sherman has sent, by flag of truce, notice to Gen'l Hood, Commander of Atlanta, to remove all non-combatants from the city, as he intends to burn the place by throwing heated shot into it. If this be true there will be a stir among the aristocracy.

Well, Father, the taking of Atlanta is rather a slow business, but we are not discouraged in the least. It will fall eventually and we hope before long. This has been a long campaign and we cannot see the end yet.

In concluding his letter, he wrote about the attitudes of the soldiers on the upcoming presidential election.

We soldiers intend electing Abe Lincoln this fall. I expect the coming draft will cause a shaking of knees in

the east, particularly among the Copperheads. Well, for one, I am glad the Administration intends pressing the War to a close. There is a need of men and they might as well come at once.

The 31st remained entrenched before Atlanta until August 26 when Sherman ordered his army to march south toward Jonesboro. On August 28 the 15th Army Corps arrived at West Point, Georgia and shortly afterwards thoroughly destroyed the railroad facilities in the city. They reached outskirts west of Jonesboro on the night of August 30 and immediately dug in to await the Confederate assault. Hood obliged on the afternoon of August 31 completely unaware that Sherman had sent his main force south of Atlanta. Hood's smaller force made several desperate charges upon the Union ramparts but the rebels were driven back in succession. The following day, Sherman went on the offensive and broke through Hood's force which retreated to Lovejoy's Station, Georgia. The 15th Army Corps left in pursuit and met the enemy on a low ridge north of Lovejoy's Station. By late afternoon of September 2, the 31st advanced and overran the Confederate skirmish pits. Sherman ordered the attack suspended in an effort to regroup and set up defenses. With the noose tightening, Hood abandoned Atlanta on September 2. The 31st retired to East Point, Georgia on September 8 to await further orders.²⁰

Unfortunately, there was no correspondence found between the dates of August 14 to September 13 to describe the fall of Atlanta. Burke did write his mother on September 13 from East Point, a place he referred to as "Victors' Retirement". He wrote in great spirits of his new camp.

My health is excellent but who could feel any other way than first rate when we consider the great victories gained by this army, and a prospect of rest which has already begun. Our permanent camp was selected three days ago,

and we moved on to it. It was thickly covered with young oak trees and brush, Every tree tall enough to make a shade and ornament the ground was trimmed up and left standing; all the underbrush cut close to the ground, leaves gathered and surface of the earth swept clean. Then the rows of tents laid out at regular intervals and in straight rows. After all this was done our camp presented a neat and comfortable appearance and might be designated as the retired retreat of a Victorious Army.

He was not as complimentary about the clothing provided by the Army and requested some items from home.

All kinds of government clothing are good except stockings and shirts. The shirts are invariably small and badly sewed. The socks are almost worthless. I would like one more shirt and two pair stockings, if you please. Also a small pocket Bible and hymn book – small enough to carry in the side pocket of my blouse. Have been carrying a Testament, but I got it wet and spoiled.

Being that the presidential elections were only weeks away, Burke wrote of his impressions of the candidates.

I do hope that Lincoln will be elected, not on the account of party or politics, but for the good of our common country. After reading the Chicago platform adopted by the McClellan party, I felt both angry and sad to think they have become so depraved. I fear for the result should McClellan be elected and carry out the policy set forth in the Chicago platform. But we hope for better things. God take care of our country. All the fighting we have done and all the blood that has been spilt to put down this rebellion will be in vain if the head of our government be entrusted in the hands of traitors.

He also wrote briefly of Atlanta and the fate of its citizens.

Sherman has ordered all the citizens out of Atlanta. A few minutes ago a train of cars loaded with citizens of Atlanta passed by going out of our lines bound for the south. The car runs out to the first station where they unload the fugitives. Many are going north, and many south. It is a hard rub on the citizens.

The last of Burke's letters to be sent from the vicinity of Atlanta was dated September 18 from East Point to his father. He once again mentioned successes of the Union Army and recent events he witnessed.

I am happy to inform you that my health is good and that I stood the hardships and fatigue of the campaign that has just closed very well. The campaign, as you are aware, has been crowned with complete success. The capturing of Atlanta and the rout and scattering of Gen'l Johnston's army. This has been accomplished with comparatively small loss to our army. Considering the advantages the army had in position and fortifications. But by the superior generalship of our commanding general, the confidence, faithfulness and bravery of his men the Rebel stronghold has fallen and the boasted Rebel hold has been dispersed. Today we are camped on ground which but a month ago a Yankee could not have stood upon and called his life his own. Such facts as these prove clearly that "Right" must and will succeed.

We do not get many Northern papers here, but those we do get grieve us – our hearts are continually made sad by the expressions of Southern sympathy. Lately I have noticed some of the most vile and treasonable pieces published. The wonder is you loyal people don't get disgusted and mob all such editors and presses. I firmly believe this war would end in six months if the North was

united; but the enemy will hold out so long as there is hope of division in the North. This appears to be their last and only hope. They have given up the idea of foreign aid. Now as Lincoln is elected, their doom is forever sealed. From him they expect no favors. His election will end the war sooner than that of any other man in the United States. The citizens of Atlanta are being sent through the lines by a truce at Rough and Ready, a station six miles from East Point. Also, an exchange of prisoners has been effected. Yesterday a train loaded with Reb prisoners went out through the lines and returned after dark with released Union prisoners. You should have heard our boys cheer when the train returned loaded with our soldiers. They said they were too hungry to cheer much, and made inquiries for hard crackers the first thing. Said they had seen hard times at Andersonville. That there still remained about 30,000 of our men there yet. Some of my Reg't returned, who were taken during the campaign. How glad they all seemed, to get out of Dixie. But I don't wonder at them.

Burke's final words from near Atlanta expressed his optimism and faith in a victorious resolution to the conflict.

The health of the army never was better, its hope brighter or success in crushing the Rebellion surer. We feel and acknowledge the hand of God has attended us in our efforts during the present campaign. That our efforts have been blessed with signal success. For these blessings the whole nation should feel thankful, but more especially the soldier now in the field.

The 31st Iowa departed Atlanta with Sherman's army on October 4. They again were in pursuit of the withdrawing Confederate army. Sherman chased Hood north to Resaca, Snake Creek Gap and Little River, Georgia. The 31st marched

over 300 miles following Hood's army before setting camp on November 6 at Vining's Station. They remained there a week before returning to Atlanta, when the regiment began their march to the sea with Sherman on November 15. Sherman's army marched southeast to Macon, Georgia where they met resistance from November 21 to November 23. After seizing the city, Sherman pressed on to Savannah, arriving at the outer reaches of the city on December 10. The rebel forces held out for ten days before evacuating. On the morning of December 21, the 31st marched into the city. They remained encamped at Savannah until January 10, 1865.²¹

The 15th Army Corps, along with the 31st Iowa, were ordered to Fort Thunderbolt on January 10 to be re-accountered. They remained at Fort Thunderbolt, four miles south of Savannah, until January 27, when they broke camp and marched northwards with Sherman's army into South Carolina. The 31st was engaged in a skirmish near Columbia, South Carolina on February 15, two days before the eventual surrender of the city. From the capitol city of South Carolina, Sherman marched his troops to North Carolina. En route to Goldsboro, North Carolina, Sherman's troops were attacked near Bentonville on March 19, but gallantly fought off the assault. The 31st witnessed heavy skirmishing for the next forty-eight hours as the Confederates retreated. They occupied Goldsboro on March 24, remaining a few days before advancing northwest to Raleigh, North Carolina. The city fell on April 13 without much of a fight. The Confederate army under General Johnston surrendered on April 26.

At the war's conclusion, the 31st marched with its brigade and division through Richmond, Virginia and on to Washington, D. C., where they participated in the Grand Review of Sherman's army on May 24. Burke mustered out with the rest of the 31st Iowa Infantry Regiment at Louisville, Kentucky on June 27, 1865. The regiment was formally disbanded at Davenport, Iowa the following week.²²

After the war, Burke returned to his farm in Andrew, Iowa. He married Lizzie McConnell of Beaver County, Pennsylvania in 1869. They brought up four boys and led a seemingly quiet and productive life. Edmund Burke Wylie died on September 19, 1918 and is interred at Andrew Cemetery.

The transcripts of Sergeant Burke Wylie's letters are housed at John F. Kennedy Library on the Eastern Washington University campus in Cheney, Washington.

Endnotes

¹ Beers, J. H. and Co., *Commemorative Biographical Records of Washington County, Pennsylvania* (Chicago: J. H. Beers & Co., 1893), 747; *Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers in the War of the Rebellion together with Historical Sketches of Volunteer Organizations, 1861-1866* (Des Moines: Emory H. English, State Printer, 1910), 3: 1682.

² *Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers*, 3: 1581-1582.

³ *Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers*, 3: 1582; Mark Hudziak, "The 31st Iowa battled from the muddy shores of Western rivers to Carolina swamps," *America's Civil War* 16, Issue 3 (July, 2003), 62.

⁴ *Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers*, 3: 1582; Lyftogt, Kenneth, ed., *Left for Dixie: The Civil War Diary of John Rath* (Parkersburg, Iowa: Mid-Prairie Books, 1991), 30-31; *Supplement to the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Wilmington, NC: Broadfoot Publishing Co., 1995) Part II, 20: 734-753; Long, E. B., *The Civil War Day by Day: An Almanac, 1861-1865* (New York: De Capo Press, 1985), 378-38.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ *Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers*, 3: 1582; Lyftogt, *Left for Dixie*, 31-33.

⁷ U.S. War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128 vols. (Washington D. C.: Government Printing office, 1880-1901), Series I, 32, (pt. 2): 627-628; Lyftogt, *Left for Dixie*, 33-34.

⁸ Sword, Wiley, *Mountains Touched with Fire: Chattanooga Besieged, 1863* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 332-339; Lyftogt, *Left for Dixie*, 35; *Official Records*, Series I, 32 (pt.2): 627-628.

⁹ Lyftogt, *Left for Dixie*, 35-36; *Supplement to the Official Records*, Part II, 20: 734-753.

¹⁰ Castel, Albert, *Decision in the West: The Atlanta Campaign of 1864* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1992), 154-186; *Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers*, 3: 1582-1583; Long, *The Civil War Day by Day*, 496-502.

¹¹ Caste, *Decision in the West*, 186-209; Lyftogt, *Left for Dixie*, 45-46.

¹² Caste, *Decision in the West*, 244-246; Lyftogt, *Left for Dixie*, 46.

¹³ *Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers*, 3: 1583; *Supplement to the Official Records*, Part II, 20: 734-753; Lyftogt, *Left for Dixie*, 47.

¹⁴ *Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers*, 3: 1583; Caste, *Decision in the West*, 307-321.

¹⁵ *Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers*, 3: 1583; Lyftogt, *Left for Dixie*, 48.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Caste, *Decision in the West*, 366-436; *Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers*, 3: 1583.

¹⁸ *Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers*, 3: 1583; Lyftogt, *Left for Dixie*, 49.

¹⁹ Lyftogt, *Left for Dixie*, 49.

²⁰ Caste, *Decision in the West*, 489-542; *Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers*, 3: 1583; Lyftogt, *Left for Dixie*, 49-50.

²¹ *Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers*, 3: 1583.

²² Ibid., 1584-1590.